DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 080 CS 500 593

AUTHOR Bailey, William
TITLE Concepts of Identity: East and West.
PUB DATE Nov 73
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (59th, New York City, Nov. 8-11, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Background; Cultural Context; *Cultural Interrelationships; Non Western Civilization; *Poetry; Religion; Religious Cultural Groups; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Sociocultural Patterns; Speech

ABSTRACT

Rhetorical discourse and poetic discourse are distinct and must be studied accordingly. Rhetorical discourse treats the world pragmatically, whereas poetic discourse contains an aspect of decoration. Murray Krieger, as a representative of the New Criticism, claims that rhetorical discourse dualizes and alienates man from his world but that poetic discourse provides a monistic experience because of its contemplative nature. However, this position is in error if Western rhetoric and logic (as pragmatic instruments of a world view) evolved from ancient mythologies and religions; that is, it is erroneous to view thought and speech as universals and to assume they have the same identity in all cultures. A more accurate intercultural view would leave rhetoric in its own cultural setting until the way it functions for a given people in a given culture is known. When fully analyzed, for example, the philosophies of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Tao Teh King, the Upanishands and Mao would show how the Orientals maintain the doctrine of "not-self," reject duality, and treat speech and thought as intellectual additions to experience. (DS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Concepts of Identity: East and West

William Bailey

University of Arizona

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William Bailey
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

ED 087080

Over ten years ago when I was a graduate student in Murray Krieger's seminar in literary theory, I bought into the New Criticism's distinctions between the functions of rhetorical discourse and poetic discourse. As you may recall, those distinctions derive from the differences between the decorative analogy of rhetoric and the organic metaphor and irony of poetry.[1] In brief, the New Critics held that rhetoric was a tool of action, a way of using the world, and therefore was too pragmatic to employ metaphor literally. Rhetorical discourse could only use metaphor for decoration and comparison. In contrast, poetic discourse of the best sort was characterized by irony and organic metaphor.[2] According to these critics, irony functions in a statement positing both A and non-A, and meaning both. Metaphor posits that A is not A, but something else and seriously means just that. This is a world of discourse in which logic is overturned[3] and practical action stymied in favor of appreciative contemplation. Or as I. A. Richards has pointed out, the yield of good poetry is contemplative stasis.[4] For these critics, treating poetic discourse as if it were rhetoric is the equivalent of trying to eat the fruit from a still-life painting. In sum, to paraphrase John Crowe Ransom, rhetorical discourse is concerned with trying to <u>use</u> the world to practical ends whereas poetic discourse is concerned with <u>cherishing</u> the world's body.[5] And according to Krieger, rhetoric dualizes and alienates man from world and language whereas poetry affords a monistic experience.[6]

CS 500 523

I could appreciate the distinctions these critics were making more than I could appreciate the non-distinctions that some rhetoricians were making as they defined rhetoric as everything to everyone. As a theoretical construct, rhetoric seemed to me on the brink of tautology. But something bothered me about the formulations of the literary critics. As some of you recall, we of the "Beat Generation" had our fling with Eastern philosophy and religion. And as with the contemporary fling, we also imported only those ideas which justified our turning off and dropping out. It was comforting to go into a graduate seminar armed with the admonition that "He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know." But what bothered me was that the very features the New Critics claimed for poetic discourse were the same features explicators of Eastern thought held up as the wisdom of the East. I couldn't imagine that the other half of the world conducted its practical affairs in poetry. But I was too naive to recognize that my sources were presenting me with generalized ideals--tendencies rather than absolutes. Consequently, I envisioned the entire Eastern population as enlightened sages and holy men, all wrapped in contemplation and rapt in unity with the Absolute. An applicable analogy would be of an Oriental studying Judeo-Christian mythology and religion and thinking of us as all saints and prophets.

Several years later, goaded by Oliver's work on rhetoric in the Orient,[7] I presented a paper at Western States arguing that what the West calls rhetoric was spawned by a cosmic vision, or world view, largely institutionalized by Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism seems to be the first major and widely influential religion to sustain a world view characterized by logical dualism and a perspective of man as autonomous and independent

in spirit from both gods and world. Man was viewed as a free agent, and at every level of his existence had to choose between an absolute good and and absolute evil. The object of this paper was to point out that both Western rhetoric and logic were the pragmatic instruments of a world view evolved from ancient mythologies and religions. In contrast, the Orient had remained constant in perspective of a wholly unitive, non-dual cosmos of which both men and gods were independent parts of, but only aspects of the Absolute.

I began a few minutes ago by talking about how the New Critics argued that poetic discourse transformed identity A into non-A, and the similarity between that position and the contentions of Eastern sages. The next few paragraphs will be something of a quick jaunt around the more popular tourist attractions in Oriental religion and philosophy. The level of generalization will be about the same as saying all Judeo-Christian religions are alike because they all believe in God.

First, I would point out that three laws of logic are generally held to govern Western discourse: the law of identity, which states that object A is always object A; the law of contradiction, which states that object A cannot assume the identity of categories B and non-B simultaneously; and the law of the excluded middle, which states that object A either assumes the identity of category B or it does not--there is no tertium quid, or third possibility. Notice that all of these have to do with permissible identity relationships in discourse, and tend to dualize identities as oppositions. That fact, as you know, considerably upset general semanticists a few years ago, and they began to seek alternatives.

The Orient explicitly rejects these laws and their dualizing tendencies.

First of all, there are no objects in the Orient's conception of a wholly unitive and non-dual cosmos. There is only oneness, and nothing to identify. To understand this, you must understand that as an empiricist the Oriental outstrips even Western science. F S. C. Northrop states "the genius of the East is that it has discovered a type of knowledge and has concentrated its attention continuously, as the West has not, upon a portion of the nature of things which can only be known by being experienced."[8] Thought and speech are intellectual additions to experience and are therefore rejected as non-substantial.[9]

For the Westerner, perhaps the most radical reaches of this empiricism is its destruction of the subject, or "self," which is also considered an intellectual addition to experience. Daisetz Suzuki has commented that the problem with "intellection or reasoning is that by its dualism it sets up the idea of 'self' as if it were a reality to which is to be given a specially honored niche in the hall of human experience."[10] Edward Conze asserts that the "specific contribution of Buddhism to religious thought lies in its insistence on the doctrine of 'not-self'."[11] The Buddhist sees the ego as simply an idea with nothing real to correspond to it.[12] Hence, the chief purpose of Buddhism is the extinction of separate individuality.[13] Therefore, Buddhists speak of dying to self, slaying the meddling intellect, and of transcending the intellect to go beyond the world of distinctions.[14]

Hinduism has its share of similar pronouncements. In his introduction to the Upanishads, Radhakrishman comments that real knowledge transcends the differentiation of subject and object. He speaks of the objective world, of which the West is so fond, as the "fallen" world, a world of "disruption, disunion, and alienation."[15] Intellectual knowledge "is a scattered, broken

movement of the one undivided infinite life . . . ."[16] Coomaraswamy comments that the enlightened man does not fear death because he has already died to self; he is a dead man walking, beyond dualities of subject and object, and literally un-self-ish.[17] In classical Taoism, and especially neo-Taoism, as Ch'en points out, the same selflessness for the sake of becoming one with the Absolute is apparent.[18] And that insistence is complemented by rejections of duality, and the rejection of speech and thought as non-experiential and therefore non-substantial. Daisetz Suzuki has argued that to the extent that thinking requires a subject-object contradistinction, there is no thinking in the Orient.[19] When the subject-object contradistinction is eliminated, opposites or contradictions are merged in the Absolute as aspects of the same thing rather than as dualities. For example, Suzuki states that "To experience the truth of spiritual merging means to realize the irrational rationality of nondiscrimination, to perceive that two contradictory terms are self-identical, that is, A is Not-A and Not-A is A," and it is "imperative to have a penetrating insight into this fundamental truth of absolute self identity of opposites."[20] The basic text of Taoism, Tao Teh King, and the Upanishads both make the same point in a variety of ways.

To make all of this relevant to the contemporary scene, one only has to read Mao Tse-tung's essay, "On Contradiction," where he argues that "the law of contradiction, that is the law of unity of opposites in things, is the basic law of materialist dialectics."[21] Mao goes on to point out that in every event or entity opposites coexist and presuppose each other in development. And this, he states, is what is meant by identity.[22] It is also worth noting that Mao describes this concept of identity as indigenous

to the East but historically tainted by idealism; in the modern world, under the correction of Marx, it becomes the basis for a materialist doctrine.[23]

We are now in a better position to understand Northrop's assertion that the Oriental uses language differently than does the Occidental: he notes that the Oriental uses language to point to components "in the nature of things which only immediate experience and contintued contemplation can convey"; in contrast, the Occidental represents the knowledge he values in hypotheses suggested by experience, but only incidental reference to immediate experience is necessary to understand this knowledge.[24] And I hope it is clear now why I began this paper by drawing parallels between what the New Critics claim for poetic discourse and Oriental concepts of identity: both involve polarized rather than dualized antitheses, monistic ineffable experiences, and contemplative stases. These features run contrary to the usual concepts of rhetoric as pragmatic or persuasive discourse.

I earlier made reference to Oliver's work of rhetoric in the Orient, and I would like to use that work as something of a strawman to sharpen the point of this paper. Oliver very properly argues that a broadening of the classical and traditional concepts of rhetoric must be undertaken if rhetoric is to be viewed as universal rather than as a cultural artifact.[25] And he broadens the concept of rhetoric considerably: rather than as a type of discourse or discovery of the means of persuasion, rhetoric includes "customs, folkways, habits, regulations--which shape communicative behavior, including thinking, speaking, listening and responding."[26] In other words, rhetoric is culture, and it seems to me, rhetoric is a tautology because

there is nothing one can designate which isn't rhetoric.

But even with so broad a definition Oliver has trouble assimilating certain aspects of the Orient into his pan-rhetoric. One finds him arguing, for example, with his sources, the Taoist sages: when they make anti-rhetorical statements, they can't really mean what they say; Oliver will make rhetoricians of them in spite of themselves.[27] I may be overly intimidated by the authors of Taoism, but I'd prefer not to argue with my informants as to what their culture is about. In this perspective, Oliver's approach illustrates the dangers of a priori assumptions that rhetoric is a universal. Obviously, we can define rhetoric as anything we want to, and seek it out everywhere, even where it isn't. But a safer course would be to leave the concept of rhetoric in its own cultural setting until systematic, empirical research shows us how discourse actually functions for the people of a given culture. Otherwise, not only do we blur the distinctive features of rhetoric in this culture, but we also use it as a darkened glass that obscures rather than sharpens our observations of intercultural communication.

Footnotes

1 For example, see Murray Krieger, "Contextualism and the Relegation of Rhetoric," Papers in Rhetoric and Poetic, Donald C. Bryant, ed. (Iowa City, 1965), pp. 46-48.

2 John Crowe Ransom, "Poetry: a Note in Ontology," The World's Body (New York, 1938), pp. 139-40.

3 Murray Krieger, A Window to Criticism (Princeton, 1964), pp. 6-7.

4 I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (London, 1925), pp. 250-52.

5 Ransom, loc. cit.

6 Krieger, Window, pp. 197-212.

7 Robert T. Oliver, Culture and Communication (Springfield, Illinois, 1962).

8 F. S. C. Northrop, The Meeting of East and West (New York, 1966), p. 315.

9 Ibid.

10 Daisetz T. Suzuki, The Essentials of Zen Buddhism, Bernard Phillips, ed. (New York, 1962),p. 388.

11 Edward Conze, Buddhism: Its Essence and Development (Oxford, 1957), p. 18.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 106.

14 Suzuki, p.389.

15 S. Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanishads (New York, 1953) p. 96.

16 Ibid.

17 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Hinduism and Buddhism (New York, n. d.), p. 17

18 Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, Buddhism in China (Princeton, 1964), pp. 62-65.

19 Suzuki, p. 41.

20 Ibid.,p. 391

21 Mao Tse-tung, On Contradiction (Peking, 1958), pp. 40-41.

22 Ibid.

Footnotes (cont.)

23 Ibid.

24 Northrop, p. 315.

25 Robert T. Oliver, Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China, (Syracuse, New York, 1971) pp. 3-11. See also, Culture and Communication, pp. 76-87.

26 Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China, p. 31.

27 This may be found in both works: See Culture and Communication, pp. 123-25; see Communication and Culture, pp. 238-40.